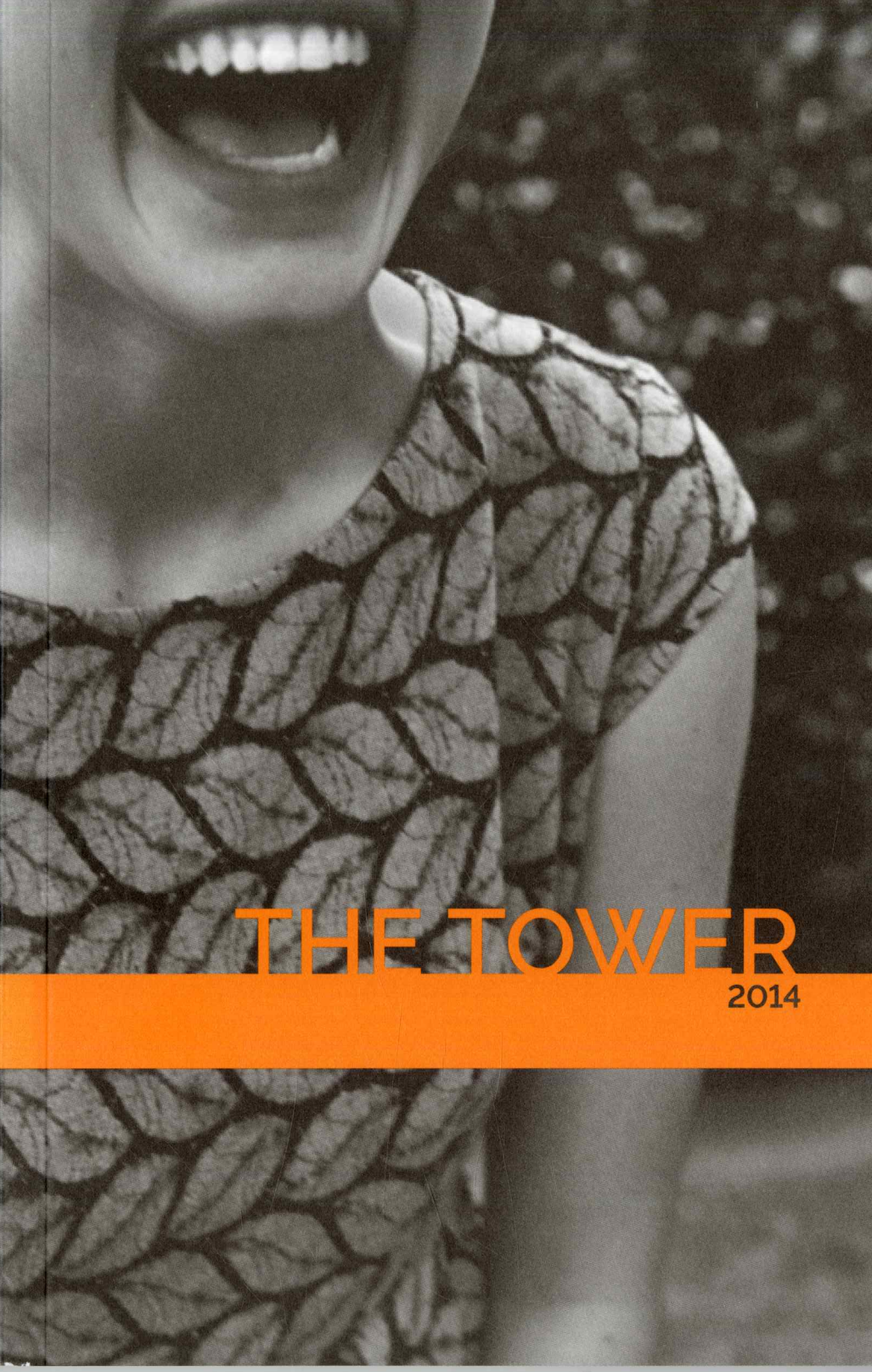
THE TOWER
2014

The Tower

University of Montevallo

2014

Hannah Stein, editor-in-chief
Bryn Chancellor, advisor

POETRY
Candice Crutchfield, editor
Shelby Jay, editorial assistant
Ryan Gillespie, editorial assistant

PROSE
Alexis Duncan, editor
Brit Headley, editor
Candice Hardwick, editorial assistant

ARTWORK
Hannah Stein, editor
Brit Headley, editorial assistant

layout and cover design by Hannah Stein
cover photo by Mary Catherine Fehr

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tower@montevallo.edu

Letter from the Editor

To the reader —

I'm excited to present this year's *Tower*. I was amazed not only at the sheer quantity of submissions we received, but also at their quality. I'm not surprised, though. Over the past four years in Montevallo, I have met some of the most talented, creative, and thought-provoking individuals. I'm proud to help document these works and these students as part of Montevallo's unique creative legacy.

This book wouldn't have been possible without my wonderful advisor, Bryn Chancellor. She gave me the freedom to make my own decisions but was never far away when I inevitably needed her. Bryn will be a valuable asset to this publication, and I'm thankful I was able to work with her over the past two semesters.

Also, I would like to thank my editors and readers — especially those who have been with me since the beginning — and Tiffany Bunt in University Relations. This edition of the *Tower* was slow to start, but without you all I wouldn't have been able to get through the end of this year and create this book.

Personally, I can't think of a more fitting way to end my Montevallo career than with this creative endeavor. I hope you enjoy this year's book, as well as those that came before and will come after it. With such an amazing selection of artists, authors, and readers here, I know that the *Tower* will only continue to grow.

Sincerely,

Hannah Stein
Editor-in-Chief

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Backroads

Loryn Patterson

A sepia breeze, everything through a dusk filter
Red clay roads that stain my pants leg
Green tipped pine perches on a light blue sky
The clouds resting gently on them like a down comforter
The branches stretch for the sky like reaching for final breaths
Only to drown in the atmosphere
Dead and brown are the defeated who lay hollow
Roots grip what is left of their fertile earth
Lost in the acres of untouched timber
Water trickles down the rocks
Running among brothers and mothers
What they are running from I don't know
But we all run from something.
My cigarette burns out and the road ends
25 going 40 and we're home
Haunted by the back roads and the dawning purity at dusk

The Drunk

Dan Lee

His life is sad
Like a country song
And his whiskey bottle
Deep and empty
His heart
Broken and over
His mud stained clothes
Smell of vomit
Old memories come back
A beautiful girl playing with his beard
And her green eyes
Gazing at him in the night
Thoughts of a soft silk casket
Only encourage him
Now to end
What never should have been

Wool Stained Black

Joel Pierce

She liked classic rock.
She liked the darker places.
She liked the quiet of solitude
That filled the empty spaces
Of her soul.

She liked tofu.
She liked Thai.
She liked Italian.
She liked to lie
And claim she had no stomach for love and such ephemeral things.

She liked the false facades.
She liked to play charades.
She liked to make them guess.
She liked to use blockades
To shield herself from the piercing, "colored lights and judging eyes."

She liked to hide beneath her bangs.
She liked to hide beneath her skin.
She liked to hide her raw, bleeding heart
Behind, inside, beneath the thin,
Cracked stone, with which she covered her Self.

She liked to see the blood.
She liked to feel the pain.
She liked to touch the scars.
She liked to use butane
Because the lighters were easier to hide.

She hated men.
She hated him.
She hated herself.
She hated the phantom limb
Of what she lost far too soon.

She's Still Too Much

Amanda Locarno

The fingers skip across the skin
And find the gaps where the pudge has been

They revel in the empty spaces
The jagged ends, the boney places

They skim along the crooks and joints
Taking note of all their points

They search the frame for faults to grasp
Linger briefly and quickly pass

They're on the hunt and won't be halted
For imperfections, she'll be faulted

The violet marks from time before
Where the skin once stretched, completely torn

The brownish specks from the sun long gone
And ragged bits from where the pains moved on

However, these are not the faults they seek
They'll win this war; they know she's weak

They rush against the frail framed form
Until, at last, they've got what they came for!

The spot, just beneath the arm that
Contains the bump,
The roll,
The fat!

They mock and tease the hollow girl
They poke, they prod; her stomach curls

The evidence they bring, she can't deny
She can see the truth with her own two eyes

She's thin and delicate to the touch
But it's not enough, and she's still too much

Carefully Looped

Brandye Parrott

Velcro, Velcro, let go of my hair!
I must not tote you everywhere.
You can walk now, down you must go;
I have to get dressed, I'm late for my show.
Bring back my bra, don't pull down my pants.
Where is my shoe, Oh I found it at last?

Now get off of that desk, hop your little self-down.
Quit jumping on the couch, keep your feet on the ground.
So many toys, so much waste,
Please, Please quit trashing the place.

You torture the cat, chase him down the hall.
When he finally lies down, you step on his paws.
I just have no idea what to do with you,
So very destructive and not even two!

I can't get dressed, I'm always late.
You never, ever leave food on your plate.
My shoes don't match, the front door is ajar,
Oh my God, I've got to get in that car!

I shouldn't have tried today, in the first place,
Now look, I've forgotten my face.
I should know by now to keep those feet off the floor,
Cause' they always keep me from going out that door!

I slow myself down, pick my Velcro back up,
Take a deep breath, step over a toy truck.
Little hands on my neck, he gives me a kiss,
Chaos or not, I'll soon miss this.

So it's, yoga pants back on, ponytail back up,
Forget the suit and the coffee cup.
Today I will sit, today I will play,
My Velcro needs me in every way.

Cassandra

Jill Self

The only legend that rivals your beauty
Is Helen of Troy herself
Dark eyes- dark hair-hooks to my soul
Phone Sex voice

I call because when you leave my apartment
I feel the emptiness of being a
Bachelor

One night I whispered sweet nothings
In your ear
We made hot steamy love
Coked out love—into the morning

Reeking of champagne and lust
You had become a follower of my religion
Overnight

The future was now yours to behold
You have the gift of knowing the future
But not being able to explain
With your phone sex voice

I call because when you leave my apartment
I feel the emptiness of being a
Bachelor

After months of being the object
Of my sexual affection- You escape
The small town life here.
I stay chained to past mistakes!

Your first visit we only talked on a state payphone
I pressed the receiver to my ear
Had to have that phone sex voice.

You wrote me mail on the irony of human kind
Fresh west coast knowledge// Fresh Cali tan
Still the woman I loved more than the others
It goes back to the dark eyes and champagne

You call when you're in town, as always
I answer because you fill my world.
I am your personal Apollo.

(To Haley, my "Boo Thang" for life.)

Everybody Talks

Angelica Williams

Everyone talks
– It's how people do.
Everybody moves and reacts
to the music, the motion around.
Grant me the peace of mind
Of the great eternal silence.
– But not yet!
Let's talk some more.
Let's move some more.
Let's make and respond
To one another
– Jive and Strive –
For this moment in time
And the moments yet to come.
The silence will come,
And all will be calm.
The virtue to strive for
– yet the one I will never know –
Is Patience.
– the name of some daughter –
For that Silence is worth the
Wait. That oh-so-mortal wait.
So now, let's have fun.
Let's get drunk and emotional
And let us be all too real.
Because this is our time and we
Should be merry.
For now,
Let's talk – like everyone, everybody else –
And dance in the music of each other's voice.

For Sydney H., who welcomed me into her house so many times and has been such good company to have. "Everybody talks," she said.

For JWB: Beautiful Liar

Karin Goodman

Watched it all go up in smoke
Ignited by every word I spoke
What I wanted wasn't worth,
Every ounce of pain I've made you hurt

I know you never meant to abuse me
Never meant to make me cry
Both of us practiced dishonesty
Both of us were caught in lies

We tried and tried,
But in the end we had to die,
Fighting is the only thing that kept us alive
But both of us knew we'd never survive

Take it for what it was
Just automatic shells of the two of us
Shattered dreams and broken things
You were my angel with weathered wings

And I, I was the devil,
With a sweet little smile
Horns holding up my halo
I was a beautiful lie

Self destructive is the label I would apply
To this, to us our beautiful lie
Hoping for something that would never be
Wanting it, but baby we were too blind to see

Drowning in the ocean of all we never were
I now know our love wasn't pure
It was deceptive and intoxicating
By the end though I was suffocating

I was in a beautiful nightmare
And you were the one to wake me up
Grasping for something that was never there
You knew all along, but I was not prepared

For the end
Of what
Kept me so alive
Our terrible, wonderful,
Beautiful Lie

Translucent Fate

Tyler Fox

This world holds no bounds,
Flowing inward from all around,
Taking to the pool for eternal life,
Yet does not save you from a final knife,
Twisted in deeper than imaginable,
Bringing an end capable,
Looking from outside it all seems murky,
Yet cannot force mercy
An end wrought from low,
Ending with snow.

Upon Retrospection

James Bennitt

remember when
the rain felt so
cold
on a sunny afternoon,
with warm high blood pressure -

we would sing:
"devil's beatin' his wife"
while watching rainbows grow
to some tune known since we were born.

and on that green accent,
with hands in hand,
we would carousel around like eddys,
and entertain the
discoursed mind which whirled our ears
as radio static
buzzing blindness.

and then fall to the sod, breathless and happy,
pick our fingers through
to the black weed-control fabric

laid so sublimely.
we would stop there,
and silently, lift ourselves up from the superficial green,
in which we had grown, and
trod, hoof heavy, back to the endless
verandas, mailboxes, hedgerows, mailmen,
milkmen, watermen, and grocerymen,
all with those glossy teeth and
pageant waves to our houses,
all with their purple doors and red
burning balls
bouncing in unison;
the doors shut.

and our discoursed world would
lull us to sleep, insidiously,
stroking us, as pets, to comfort us past her
guilded and jagged
shape to some calm wood
that would close our eyes and
dream of her beauty.

Then, when the midnight crosstown trains
would wake us,
and remind us that we could ever be so aware
of the cool night, the distant cloud,
that we could see the
nakedness of the bare sky
with its prodding pale pearls, and
that we could lean awakened with a shiver over soft eyes,
with even false dreams,
broken off hard like a sledged blue roof beam,
ever so aware, suddenly,
that-

hell, remind me,
the next time I am happy,
never commit
to a propaganda
without proper recognition.

South and Central

Karson Goodman

South and central, something teethed
leans up against the fencepost
rubbing elbows along a crackling white
layer of paint. Squares chip off in labyrinth procession,
following concentric circles inward
until the grain shows through.

Southern scenery in its truest form; the porch
table seats eight Alabama ghosts, acquaintances
made atop the wooden bunk bed mezzanine,
half the family slumbering below.
Then and now,
I neglect to send invitations to driveway bonfires,
occult open house, gourmand suppers to fill my rotted stomach.

Come October, we'll all have a chill to set us
right between the deadened and frightful portents.
Know it by the howling of blood.

The Usual Crowd

Karson Goodman

i am so sorry for
failing to see
the two of you were
trying to fuck
and we were three

guys just hanging
out. it's clear now:
i was the one
making the most love

the swallow space
between your tongues,
the staggered Bud Light
breath, and the motley
hand down both of your
pants, its back pressed
gently to your foreheads

Gaze

Justin Adams

Terror blocks touch, fear of the Gaze
Judgment, crystallization,
I become stone
Out of time and space,
Nowhere Man

Drinking alone, stare and then
Look down
They fear the Gaze too,
Clutching themselves to themselves,
Alone even in a group

I drift in and out of consciousness
I feel like I'm falling,
First through the floor,
Then through the Earth
Still I see them

I taste blood on my lips
I feel the Gaze of Others,
Around me, looking down
The clucking of tongues,
The chattering of teeth

A pain in the back of my head,
A loss of Equilibrium
New perspective, looking up
At faces, now shocked and disgusted
I feel the urge to laugh, and I think I do, but who knows?

The Gaze defines me and defines others,
And I think and I wonder,
Do we exist outside of it?
Are we only how others perceive us, empty voids?
What are we?

Hannah

Joel Dunaway

Your Hand in Mine
The warmth in your touch enthralls me,
Your gaze consumes my being,
Your soft caress makes me feel as though
No one on this miserable planet exists,
Save you.
Before you leave me and go,
There is something you must know,
You have always been a guardian angel to me,
And in my heart, you will forever be.
Maybe when you've found what is out there,
You will come back to me,
Because for you, I will always care,
And that's how it will forever be.
But from now till then, I'll be all alone,
Because my heart, to the world, will remain unknown.
I will never blame you for the tear in my heart
For I chose to love you from the very start.
You'll never know how much I hurt, and have cried,
For I'll wear all of these feelings all on the inside
And if you choose someone else, I won't know what to do
You'll know how sad I am, only by this verse I've written you.

(2006)

Ode to a Falcon

Joel Dunaway

My heart aches, it is pulled and torn apart
It writhes, and moans - was poisoned through mine ear,
My tongue and soul are in accord for sorrow to depart
They thirst for solace in in drink to numb a lonely fear.
O! how I envy the fleeting Falcon's flight -
Thy stoic perch, friendless save thy wings and talons.
Queenless King of the wide open sky.
Thou liberated regional Kite
Whose wings cleave winds with unbridled balance
How envious of thy ephemeral aerie am I.
Fly on! O ancient hawk of horizons.
Though my dismal heart encumbered by spring lies frozen,
I watch for the second coming of thy pinions
To sooth my soul of the lecherous lady I have chosen.

ARTWORK

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as you were, digital drawing, Lila Dostal

23 **Ruins,** ink, Michaela Graber
Oyarses, pen, Nathan Harper

24 **Face,** mixed media, Nathan Harper

25 **Connections,** pen, Chantel Clubb
Burlesque, pen, Chantel Clubb
Propagandist, watercolor monoprint, Kimberly McWhorter

26 **Mechanical Nature,** gelatin silver print, Kimberly McWhorter

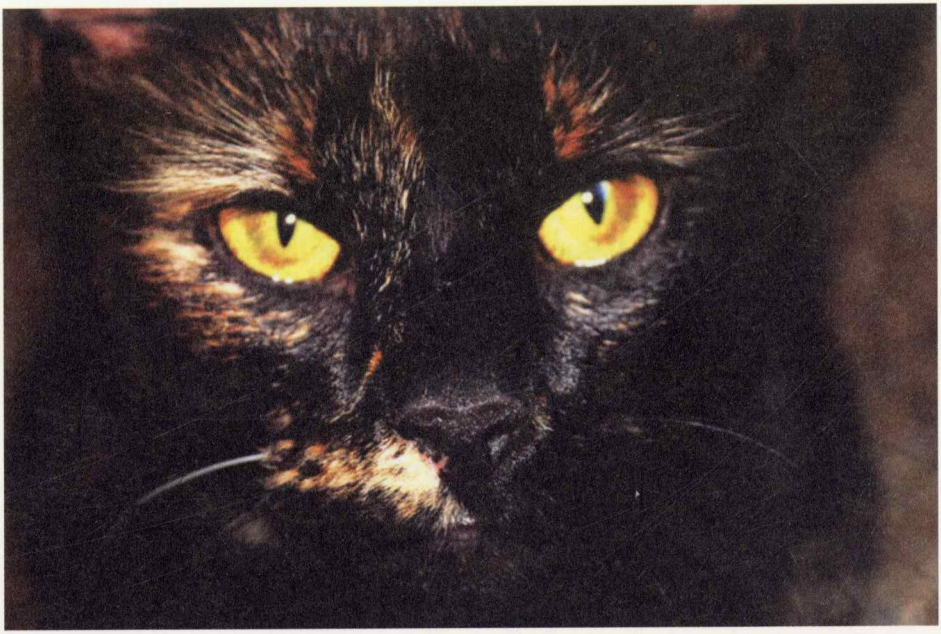
27 **Frogs on Hogs,** pencil, Hannah Pearson
Mata Mata, pencil, Hannah Pearson

28 **Different Whales,** pencil, Hannah Pearson
good for the soul, photo, Mary Catherine Fehr

29 **The Dining Hall,** digital image, Ashlyn Postell
The Barracks, digital image, Ashlyn Postell

30 **Telophase,** print, Carly Zywno

31 **The Veil,** watercolor, pen and ink, Hannah Martin
You Deserve Someone Better (cropped), monotype print, Hannah Martin



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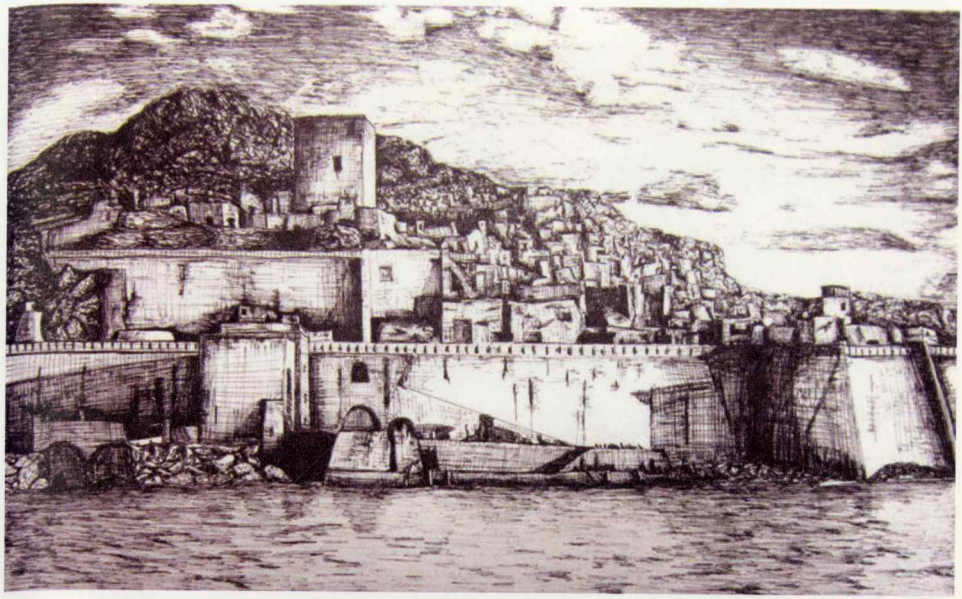

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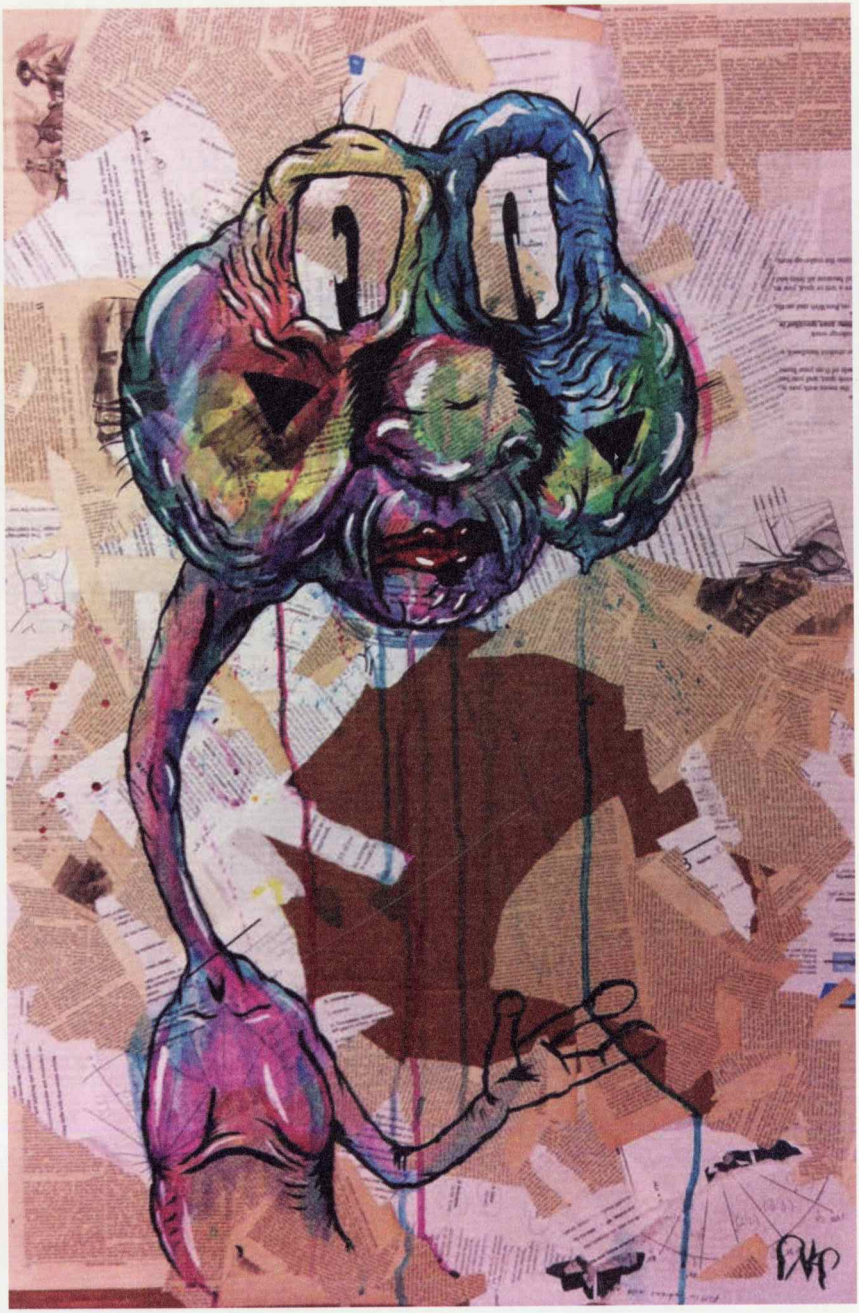

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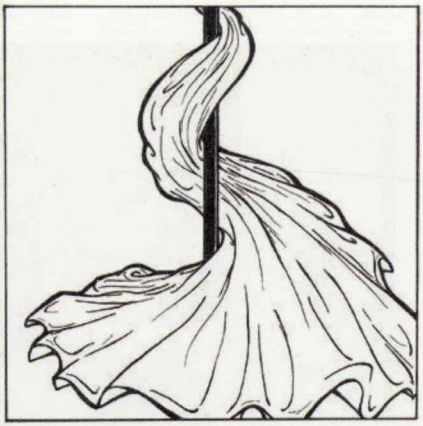

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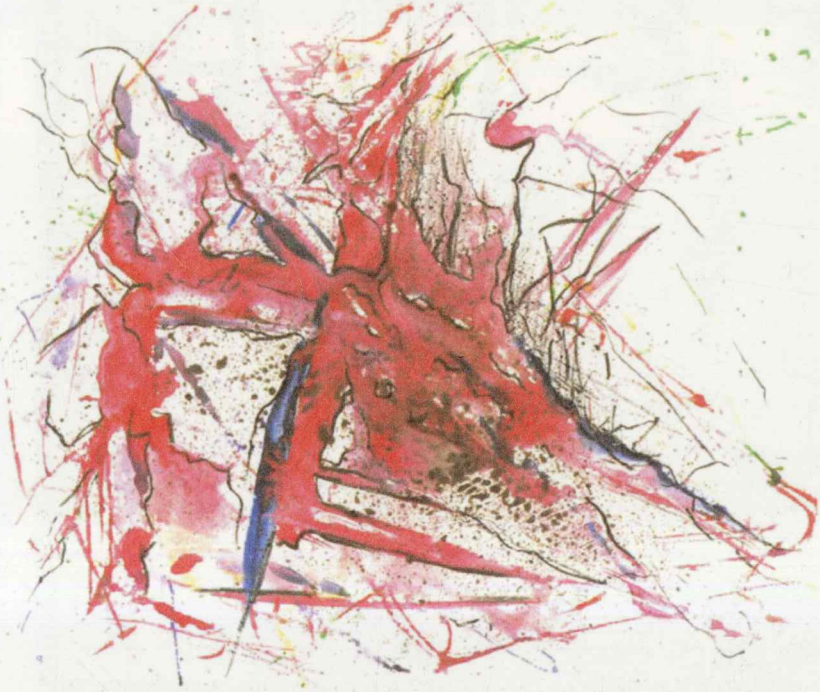

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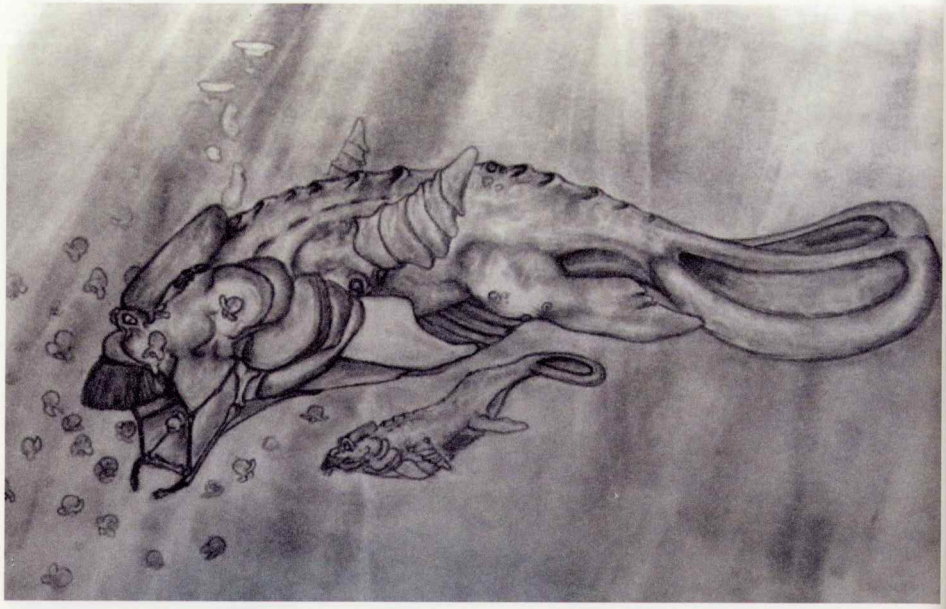

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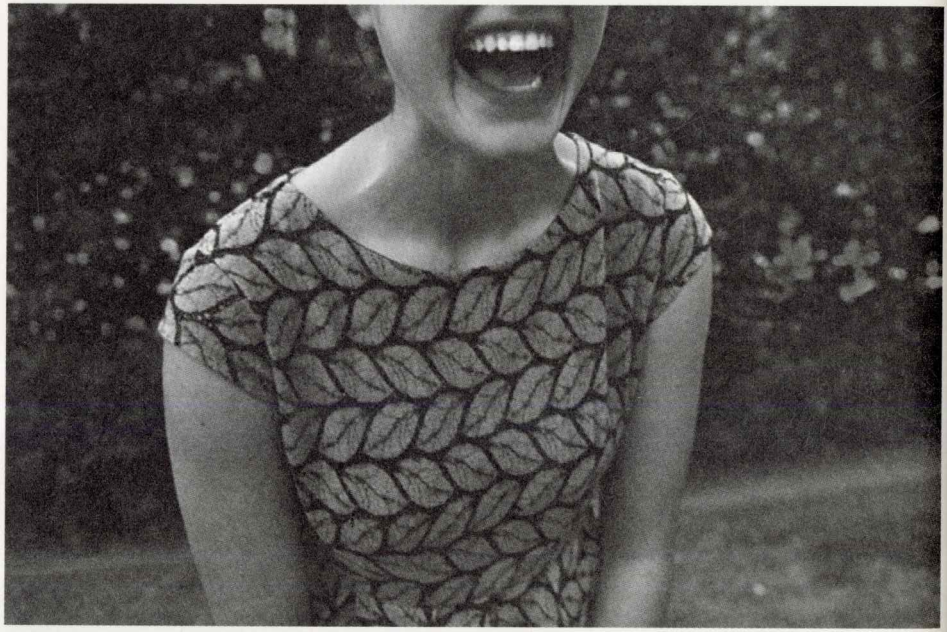

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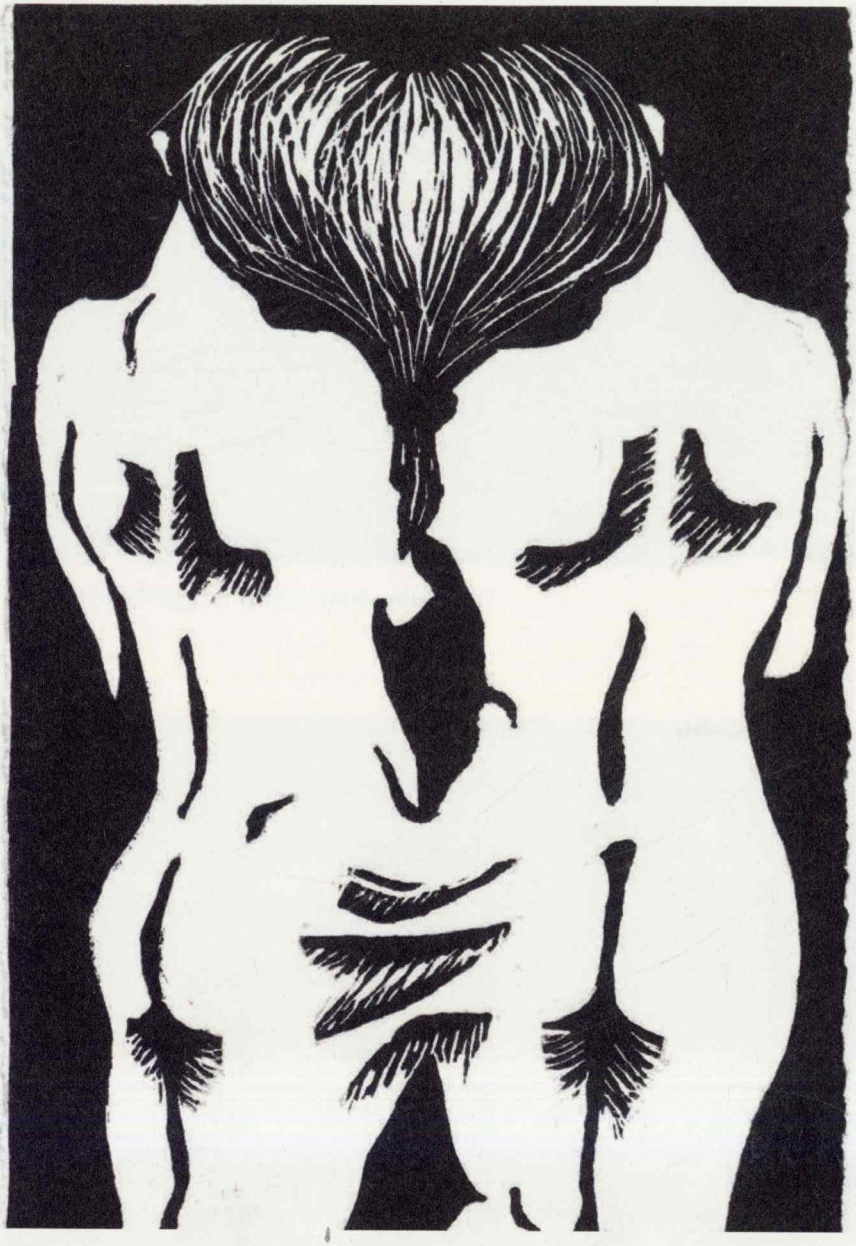

Telophase, Carly Zywno

The Veil, watercolor, pen & ink,Hannah Martin

You Deserve Someone Better (cropped), monotype print, Hannah Martin

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50 **She Kindly Stopped For Me,** Mary Katherine Calderini

To Don't Today

Mary Katherine Calderini

Don't forget to turn off your alarm when you wake up.

Don't sit there for five to ten minutes pondering life. You have things to get done today.

Don't stub your toe on the stool by the bathroom door.

Don't kick the stool by the bathroom door in anger when you stub your toe on it.

Don't curse more than three times when you realize your milk expired two days ago.

Don't spend longer than five minutes looking for the artificial powered coffee creamer you are certain you purchased at some point in your life.

Don't get too excited when you find it. It's really not that big of a deal.

Don't forget to pretend you can't taste the difference between the artificial powdered coffee mate creamer and milk in your coffee.

Don't forget to fake a contented sigh as the last badly creamed sip slips down your throat.

Don't try to turn on that lamp. You know that the bulb burned out last night.

Don't forget, you need to buy a lightbulb.

Don't wear that black dress. It's dirty, remember?

Don't look for your keys. They're where they always are.

Don't text your boyfriend. He probably isn't awake yet.

Don't drive too close to the red pickup truck just because he cut you off.

Don't speed.

Don't begrudge the school bus for making you stop in the middle of the road for a good seven minutes.

Don't speed.

Don't run the yellow light.

Don't speed.

Don't pull too far to either side of the parking space.

Don't seem too friendly when you smile at the cashier.

Don't check your phone to see if your boyfriend has answered the text you sent him.

Don't drum your fingers on the shelves as you search for the lightbulb.

Don't feel so pleased with yourself when you find the correct type of lightbulb. Anyone can do that.

Don't check your phone to see if your boyfriend has answered the text you sent him.

Don't frown like that when you see he read it thirty minutes ago.

Don't buy that chocolate bar at the cash register area. You don't need it.

Don't stare longingly at the chocolate bar at the cash register area.

Don't pick up that chocolate bar.

Don't do it.

Don't read the tabloid headlines as the cashier rings you up.

Don't let the tabloid headlines give you any ideas as to why your boyfriend has not replied to the text you sent him.

Don't let it get to you.

Don't check your phone to see if your boyfriend has answered the text you sent him.

Don't spend the whole ride home distracted and almost hit a squirrel.

Don't check your boyfriend's Facebook page the second you get in the door.

Don't get upset when you see a picture of him with a girl you don't know.

Don't forget there could be a logical explanation.

Don't spend the rest of the day cleaning to distract yourself.

Don't check your phone every five minutes to see if your boyfriend has answered the text you sent him.

Don't picture him with that girl you don't know.

Don't forget to install the lightbulb you purchased.

Don't stub your toe on the stool by the bathroom door.

Don't be so hard on yourself when you drop the lightbulb and it shatters.

Don't sink to the floor like that.

Don't cry.

Don't cry.

Don't cry.

Stop it.

Don't forget to eat something before you go to bed.

Don't forget to plug your phone into your charger.

Don't check your phone to see if your boyfriend answered the text you sent him.

Don't lay awake for hours after you go to bed.

Don't forget to make a new list for tomorrow.

Solitary Confinement

Jessica Russell

We are falling. Zero gravity, we are suspended above our silencing. Can't recall how we got here, don't know when we'll get there. The immediacy was of something we were all aware, watch out below. Looking up, down, around, nothing was illuminated to us but flashes of objects and concepts we could no longer recognize. Was that a house or a cage? An angel or a demon? Like the depreciated filaments of a former memory, we clash and flounder when coming to a consensus of how to interpret these lighted obscurities. Abandoned shadows of an earlier consciousness, we suppose. The only sound, the streaming of air, dries up as we near the closeness. A degenerating whistle, and then, just as sudden.

The sun is shining. We awake. Peaking beams from the skylight alert us of the rising day. We lie in our cots. Timid lids open to be met with bright white, we stir. Now-active limbs yawning to the extent of their reach, the left legs promptly seized, falls short of its measure. Chains clink as the metal unyielding around our ankles holds fast. Raw blisters remind us that this wasn't the first time. Not even the seventh.

We press our thumbs in the space between the pink flesh and our confinement, forming circles, soothing the affliction. We act quickly to prevent swelling, before our shackles clench tighter, like the serpent embracing the gasping field mouse wringed inside its coils. We must allow it space to breathe.

We are limited. There are no citrus yellows or powder blushes, mossy greens or ocean blues. These walls are vacant, a blanched canvas that stretches over a four-by-four space. Names to remember, dates to count, theories to discover, scratched over, marked out, and drawn through by those that came here before us. We cannot comprehend the significance of a sequence of tallies or a carved reminder. We do not guess since these authors were silenced. They remain as expressionless spirits whose muted whispers seep through the cracks in our walls. Their waves wash over our ears, yet cause no wake in our ports. We hear nothing, yet feel something.

At night, the moonbeams slide past the barred windows, and we become more sensitive to their presence. They've lost their shells, somewhere in the corporeal world, and linger as scattering flashes of dust. The nocturnal contrast between light and dark, when aided by a celestial flashlight, highlights their shapeless speckles. Their

glowing presence sprinkle over our cells as if to reclaim what once was theirs. This was where they dreamed, they laid, they wrote, they spoke, and then, they died. Their silencing was the hammer that shattered their form, the now-voiceless ghosts of an oral past. How do we know this? By word of mouth, of course.

We know why we have come here: to be reborn. This process, as we were told, includes the immediate seizure of expression: the gradual subduing of the larynx, the anesthetizing of the appendages and limbs, and the stretching out of the grin. Sporadically, we chirp numbers, phrases, curses, until all that remains is the dust settling at the bottom of our lungs as we wheeze ourselves into straight-faced poltergeists, respiring apparitions of our former selves. Breathe in; we desperately write out all that remains within us on the surface of our secured limitations. Memories, beliefs, thoughts, preferences. Breathe out; and it all turns to vapor. We will cough, and cough, until we expel ourselves into smoke. Until we too are silenced.

Loose Lips, Burnt Tips

Amanda Locarno

The bench is green. It's an old metal bench with brown patches from where the paints been weathered and chipped. These spots catch my left hand as I run it up and down the armrest, trace it across the edge of the seat, and then bring it to rest on the flat space just beside me. My right hand rests on the corresponding leg, cupping the knobby kneecap while balancing the rolled paper between my middle and pointer finger, allowing the burning tip to sway back and forth in the breeze. The gusts periodically blow my frail yellow locks of hair off my neck and against my face. The wild strands whirl around my head, while the choppy ends tickle at my chin. I feel all of this, completely, from the warmth of the bench seeping through my light floral dress to the soft dirt squishing beneath my toes through my dark green boots. I feel life in every bit of me, radiating from my core and escaping out through all my points. Today is a good day, the first good day in a long time.

A smile is slowly creeping across my face, beginning at the right cheek and widening out to the left one. On good days smiles appear quick and easy, as if they were always that way. I lift my right hand up to my face, spreading my fingers across my lips, and placing

the joint between them. My eyelids calmly drop as I slowly inhale, breathe breathe breathe, until I reach capacity and let my hand fall to the bench. I don't let the smoke out, not yet. It's trapped, stewing inside me so as to not waste a bit. It is warming my insides and burning up my throat, begging to be set free. Not yet. Not yet. Not yet. Soon enough I will... "COUXKOUGH! UHCOUGH! Coh! Coh." The fit of coughs force my eyelids open.

As I clutch my knees the noise from my throat slowly fades away, stops completely, and then starts again as something completely different. It begins as a snicker, grows to a giggle, and transforms into hysterical laughter. Laughs, on good days they come about just like smiles, quick and easy. As my lungs clear I watch the old swing set about 20 yards out from me. The distant smiling joggers and the immediate trees surrounding me all shrink and grow, blur and clear, and morph and settle. I let my eyelids fall again, quietly enjoying the mental tilt as a smirk plays across my face.

Sarah is walking up now. I can hear her shoes kicking the dirt as she shuffles up to the bench and I feel the tensions of her weight on the seat as she sits down to the left of me. We both knew we'd be here. Despite everything, it would never occur to either of us to be anywhere else. Which, I suppose, is part of the problem.

"Hello Freddie!" she begins, faking optimism. There's a comfortable pause before I respond with, "Hey." Now, there's an uncomfortable pause. During which I open my eyes, turn to Sarah, and take all of her in. From the outfit of cream strappy sandals, faded capri jeans, and large white cotton shirt that hangs loosely from her tiny structure to her limp, bleached strands of hair that frame a face of dark eyes and bright red painted lips. I take another slow drag before Sarah decides the silence has gone on long enough.

"I just want you to know that I understand why you did what you did, and it's okay... I mean, it wasn't that big of a deal, really... I'm over it, really! It wasn't your fault either. I saw it coming and I should have said something... and you should have said something. So we are even, really, we both messed up and I'm not mad! I'm fine, really... and I don't blame you, Fred, I don't. Tim kind of blames you. He thinks you're nuts, but I don't Fred, really! I just never realized how much it had— and if I would have done something, but I didn't realize until..."

And now she's off. I'm not actually listening. I never really have to actively participate in these conversations. She talks and I nod, muster up some ambiguous affirmation, or ask some vague non-topical - ly specific question. This is another part of the problem, I guess.

On good days this does not bother me. On good days, there is so much more in the world to experience that I don't even notice her insignificance. On these days, the world is mine and everybody else is just along for the thrill of the ride. However, on the days when my surroundings are distant and the world is grey, all I have to cling to is the people that occupy the space around me. On these days, I desperately snatch at anybody to pull me back in and I always slip, always. Bad days, those are the days that all the cracks show through the haze. Those are the days that I need things to mean so much more, and yesterday was a bad day.

"He probably meant something by it, right? I mean, he did specifically ask me if we were going. So he really wants me to go, right? Or at least, he wants to make sure I'm going, right?"

"Probably. What were his exact words?"

"Well, he had walked up to Matt to talk about the band or the rehearsal tonight or something, and mid-sentence right, really in the middle of talking to Matt, he notices me, turns to me, and says the exact words, really, he says, 'Hey Sarah, you and Frankie are coming to the practice gig Friday, right?,' and I said, 'Maybe' and that I would see if you still wanted to go, just to see what he would do, really. But then the second block warning bell rang and we all had to go to class, right, so what do you think?"

"It is official. He wants your body."

Yesterday, I was sitting on this exact same bench. The sun had been down for hours. Things were generally the same. My dress was the same, and the girl beside me was the same, but some things were different. For starters, my hair was pulled back into a loose bun, and the rolled paper in my hand was commercial and tobacco filled. Oh, and I was different. It was a bad day in a 30 day long streak of bad days (the longest streak to date), and I was becoming desperate. The kind of desperation experienced by someone who is trapped within themselves, constantly feeling the world as if it is at the other end of a long dark hallway. I needed out. I needed an exit and being force-fed every minute detail of Sarah's ridiculously childish and mind-numbingly boring crush on Timothy Masterson was not the way to find it.

I can now calmly and objectively look back on this desperation and name it the reason for my actions last night and the actions leading up to last night.

It was this desperation that led me to answer, "Yeah, of course I'm going" when Sarah turned to me on that dumb green bench and

asked, for the hundredth time, "You are going with me, right? Please don't make me go by myself!"

It was this desperation that, thirty minutes later, led me to rise from said bench, grab her by the hand, and walk through the back of the park in the direction of Tim's house. That and the annoying way Sarah was looking at me; as if to say, "You've been acting really lame lately and you are meant to entertain me, so dance puppet dance!" or whatever other self-centered thing she could possibly be thinking. I do not blame her for being a shallow noise box, she is what she is. We are both what we need each other to be. Little did we both know, as we walked through the basement door of Tim's parent's three-story estate, that we would both be playing our parts perfectly tonight.

As we slowly made our way down the long dark stairway leading to the basement I tried to mimic Sarah's pace in the hopes that it would appear like I too had never been there. I took great pains to observe the metal banister that clung to the right side of the hallway and the slender fluorescent that lined the ceiling all the way to the end of the passageway. Honestly, I gave an Oscar-winning performance. All in vain, of course.

Once we reached the bottom of the stairs the room hit us all at once. It was an average-sized basement for a house of the proportion, but it had never seemed this small before. Between the wood platform that had been erected at the far end of the space to serve as a makeshift stage and the "clearly-over-fire-safety-capacity" amount of people, it was a tight squeeze. It was pitch black and startlingly bright all at the same time, thanks to the lack of windows and the cheap rotating stage lights sitting in the corners of the room.

But the very first thing that grabbed me was the noise; the sporadic squeaks and squawks from the band tuning up, the bum-bum-bum base of some pop song playing at a mellow volume, and the mindless chatter of all my peers. It is like the fourth law of physics: If you cram a bunch of attention-grabbing teenagers into a tiny cement-walled enclosure, they will make sound. It was small, it was dark, it was crowded, and it was perfect.

It was the ideal place to lose myself in, and that is exactly what I did. I immediately left Sarah at the door, disappearing into the crowd. I could vaguely hear her calling my name as I slowly increased the gap between us and made a mental note to say something later about thinking she was right behind me. Some significant measure of time later I had shuffled my way over to my intended destination; a white easy up table stationed just to the left of the impromptu stage.

Accompanying the table were a few sacks of multicolored cups, an assortments of fancy looking bottles that screamed, "I picked the lock on my rich parents' liquor cabinet," and (much to my surprise and convenience) Tim Masterson himself, waiting for me with a smile.

"Hey Freds, having fun?"

Tim is attractive in that typical skinny-boy-in-a-band-with-long-hair-and-lots-of-headbands kind of way. Basically, he is cute enough, especially when he smiles, especially when he calls me "Freds." So I grabbed a bright green cup and a swanky bottle containing some brown liquid, poured until the container was about half full, flashed him a smile, and replied, "Just got here, you?"

"Eh, it'll pick up once we start playing."

"Can't wait."

"I'll see you later, right?"

"Yes, you will."

On that note I brought the cup to my lips, tilted it back, and emptied all of its contents. I left him at the table. There was no need to stick around. We now had plans for later.

I found a bewildered-looking Sarah near the center of the crowd. She had clearly been looking for me ever since I had last seen her and was obviously annoyed,

"Where have you been?! I haven't seen Tim yet. Have you? Do you think he knows I'm here?"

Luckily, all of her questions could go unanswered, because at that exact moment Tim grabbed the mic and began his spiel,

"Hello everybody! First off, I would like to thank all of you crazy bitches for coming, and remind you that this is just a practice set for our warm-up gig next Saturday at Crazy Phil's! So if we stop, start-over, make notes, or play songs twice, get over it! You get what you paid for! And with that, we are Slightly Past Due, and this is Cranberry Rain!"

They played and he was right. They did stop, repeat songs, and mess up, oh boy did they mess up, on an extremely consistent basis. However, nobody seemed to care. Half of the crowd was too drunk or high to realize there was even a live band performing in the room. One particularly rowdy sect of the congregation kept spontaneously breaking out into chants of "SPD! SPD! SPD!" which always died down as quickly as it had begun.

Everyone was enjoying themselves. Everyone that is, except me. Despite the dancing, the music, and the multiple trips to the white

table, nothing could reach me. In a cramped sweaty mob of people, I was so cold that I would swear up and down one glance to my eyes would reveal ice crystals where blue irises once sat.

If there was any physical evidence of my emotional detachment, Sarah had not noticed. Between acting aloof of the band, to whose music she was dancing, and constantly asking me whether or not I thought Tim was looking at her, there really was no time left over to devote to anything else. It's fine; I would get plenty of attention from her later.

At that moment, my main objective was to seize all open opportunities or, as it would turn out, be seized by them. Later, long after the band had left the stage, while on my way to the white table for the 7th or 8th time, someone grabbed me from the left around the wrist and before I knew what was going on I was being pulled arm first into a supply closet, slam, and the door closed. It was extremely dark due to the fact that the room was singularly lit by a small hanging bulb just above my head. Two things were certain. One, I was surrounded by cleaning liquids, mops, and brooms. Two, there was a relatively tall guy standing about a foot in front of me.

"Hey Freds." Oh, and I was more than completely certain it was Timothy Masterson.

"Took you long enough"

"I had to wait for your stray dog to leave your side"

"Oh yeah your stalker! She's probably looking for both of us right now."

"Well, I guess she will just have to keep looking for awhile."

During this brief dialogue we had slowly and ever so slightly inched our way towards each other. We were now so close that his head was blocking the only light source and I was cast into total darkness, but I could feel him there, just within reach. I could feel his lips as he finally bridged the small gap of space between us and pressed them to mine, and I could feel his hands as one gingerly messaged the back of my neck and the other slowly found its way beneath the top of my dress.

The truth about this whole Tim thing was that it was merely a highly convenient means to an end. It began on the tenth day of the bad day streak. I was walking up to my usual swing down at the park after school and there, swaying to and fro, in my swing was Tim. He looked up at me, smiled, and said,

"Hey. Freddie, right? Or do people call you Freds?"

"Yes and no," I replied, "but you can call me Freds."

So I sat down at the swing next to him. We talked for a bit, and then ended up in this exact same basement. That formula more or less repeated itself on bad days 13, 17, 18, 22, 25, and 26. Bad days always seemed to be slightly improved by having someone between your legs. Except, of course, on the day where I found myself wedged in between shelves of disinfectants in a dark basement closet fiddling with Tim's belt while beneath the skirt of my dress he fiddled with me, while in my head I was screaming, "Fuck this!"

Maybe it was the fact that I was erring on the side of drunk, the fact that the belt in my hands was not cooperating, or the fact that Tim had no clue what he was doing down there, but as I clumsily backed up and felt the cool metal door against my back, a million thoughts rushed through my mind at once, a million thoughts ultimately culminating in a split-second decision.

I'm done. Not working. I need excitement. I need something more. I need something real. I need something painful. I need something shocking, something more. Something hurtful... Sarah is probably looking for me now. She would look near the drinks. That's around here. If not, small room. She would see. The room needs some excitement. Do it! Just pull him in! Lean back a little! Do it! Grab the doorknob! Now! Grab it! Grab and fall! Go!

"Freddie?!"

The room looked so different from down there. There were a lot more staring eyes than when I was vertical; all the upside down faces with their confused, glossy, questioning eyes. Tim jumped up off me immediately and shrank into the wall without a word. But I did not move.

"Freddie?!"

I could hear her, but I could not see her. I searched all the stark faces above me for the livid face of Sarah, but it was not to be found and then—

"Freddie?!"

As if from nowhere at all, there she was standing right over me with a face not of anger, but of confusion and sympathy, as if she did not understand the scene in front of her. "Freddie, are you okay?" I was stunned.

"Are you serious?" I sat up straight out of pure shock. She walked around, knelt beside me, and looked me in the eyes as plainly as if we were discussing the history final.

"Yes."

"Why aren't you mad?"

"Do you want me to be mad?"

"I NEED you to be mad!" At this point, I was yelling. She, however, was not. The more she kept her composure, the more I lost a grip on mine.

"Why?"

"Because I'm bored! Because I'm sick! Because I'm sick and I'm wrong and I need you to hurt! Why aren't you mad? Don't you care?" I was becoming frantic.

"No, Freddie. I don't." There was that calm composed tone! It got under my skin. It ate at me. She should be mad! She was going to be mad! I was going to regain control of the situation!

"So you're not mad, huh? Not mad that I've lied to you for weeks. Not mad that me and little Timmy over there spent our days mocking your silly pathetic crush."

"No, I'm not," there was a catch in her voice, "mad," she finished in her newfound ambivalent tone, as she reached her hand forward and stroked my head in a infuriatingly patronizing way. But the armor was faltering. I heard it and I was out for blood.

"It's sad, really, how you actually thought you had a chance."

Smack. I did not see her hand coming, but I felt it across my left cheek. There was a long period of silence, during which I once again became aware of all the staring eyes as I heard their owners awkwardly evacuating the area. Sarah stood without a word and followed the crowd up the stairs. I'm not sure how long I sat there staring at the floor beside me before I began to laugh. It started out as a giggle and slowly grew into hysterics. Once the laughs died down I stood up and made my way over to the white table one last time.

Tim was sitting at the edge of the stage watching me with a wary eye as if I was a wild animal that might go rogue at any point. I grabbed one of the fuller looking bottles and made my way to the exit. I briefly paused when I reached the entrance to the stairway, yelled back, "Great party!" and continued on my way out.

By the time I finally stumbled my way back to the park and haphazardly lifted myself into a swing my face was drenched in tears. So I drank, I swung, and I proudly let the tears fall, because tears are like smiles and laughs. On good days, they happen quick and easy.

"...I mean, I guess slapping you was ridiculous. Really, I realize that. But you were right, I was mad. It was what you wanted really and it was what you got, but I'm not mad, really. I thought..."

I never left the park last night. At some point I wandered from the swings over to the bench, and I've been here ever since. Everything was just too clear and invigorating. I couldn't make myself leave.

"Tim came by my house after you left his house... asked if I was okay... we talked about..."

"So it all worked out in the end." She's just staring at me now. It's as if she just realized my complete lack of remorse for the events of the previous night.

Oh, you should see her face. Her innocent, wide-eyed stare has tightened a bit at the edges, and her bright red lips are pressed ever so furiously together. The poor fool, it is probably just now occurring to her that my previously assumed apology never actually existed. I had won. She had gotten angry. She had slapped me. I got what I wanted and I am not going to fake apologies over it. I found her cracks. She had them too. And they would come in handy later. I'm going to keep her around. But for now, I'm done having my fun. I cannot bask in the pleasure any longer. It is now my turn to break the silence.

"Wanna go to lunch?"

"What?"

"Let's go to lunch. It's a good day, we shouldn't waste it."

World's Eye View

James Conrad

In this binocular view can be seen everywhere those eyes have been, even in a single black center. In the morning they are glossed over, seemingly encrusted with diamonds of only the highest clarity; in the midday hours the shine is a smooth and dark becoming of a lustful glass surface; by nightfall they are the sun going down across the other end of every sea they have seen.

When the Sun becomes rested it rises for a new day, and closed eyes are once again reopened; slowly, through an eerie fog which paints the open field of a hunting property in Quincy, Florida. The opaque and mysterious shadows of animals are barely visible through the growing light, their coats left to the imagination, thus far.

The glimmer of first light peeks above the treetops and a small piebald doe makes her entrance with her sister does, their spotted young fawns being sure not to venture too far from their mothers. Her over coat is a light, sandy beige, but her legs are almost completely white and seem to engulf her lush brown fur like the corneas surrounding light brown eyes.

A small flock of black birds frightfully take wing from the clamor of an electric feeder spraying corn across the patch of open space in the pupil center of the forest. The cloud of birds disappears into the ominous mist, and the milky glaze over the forest does not dissipate until the sun is aloft and all eyes are open and attentive.

One blink and the fields of wildlife are transformed to the littoral setting of Lake Talquin, an entire palate of greens of every shade — emerald, chartreuse, and every color in between. Colors at harmony rest within those as eyes smoothly as the surface of the lake does on a windless day. The depths of those eyes are as mysterious as the depths of the nontransparent lake: nobody knows, has known, or ever will know what lies beneath the surface, try to find out as they may.

Just outside the window of the quaint lake house, kids bait their hooks with crickets and cast off to the side of the dock, pulling in bream of all different sizes and colors. The indigo platings on the sides of bluegills, the red-orange underside of the red-bellies, and the jade reflections of green sunfish.A few hours away from the lake is one of Florida's more tropical settings. At Seaside, the reflection of those eyes displays the powdery white beaches, the infinitely extensive collection of seashells, smooth and rough alike, embedded into the sand, and finally the crystalline waters of ever-changing colors, so far unnamed.

Her eyes display more secondary and tertiary colors all at the same time as the waves continuously crash against the sand bars. Are they hazel? Cyan? Aquamarine? One can never look at them long enough to find out before becoming captivated in the mystery of the fluctuating spectrum.

The fluorescent rays of sunshine reflect off of the glossy shine overlain across the surface. When the sun descends and becomes a different hue altogether, the luminescence is shown spectacularly through the clouds; shades of brown and blue and grey mingle simultaneously with a growing peachy orange, a thriving neon magenta, and a dying larimar blue, creating an entirely new compass of colors.

The last ray of daylight has dipped down beneath the unreachable horizon and the veritable rainbow of her eyes has have subsided. Now all that is left is an unclouded sky caked over with glisten-

ing stars so brilliant that the lines connecting constellations are virtually visible to the naked eye. Every scenic landscape with every color in the spectrum is prevalent in the one beautiful southeastern peninsula of Florida, and every color so far undocumented can be seen in the breathtaking landscape that is her world's eye view.

Searching...

Joel Pierce

We are the last of our kind. The Earth has taken our brethren, has blanketed them in suffocating sandstorms, stilled their blood with icy gusts, thinned and weakened them for lack of food, and pierced their hearts and souls with jagged teeth and sharpened tusks. The Earth has swallowed us whole, gorging itself upon us, the most hated of her inhabitants. We are the cause of those who destroyed her. We created the creatures who defiled and consumed our Earth. We created them, and so the Earth hates us. And we die. We die to pay for our sins.

Our creatures, creations turned upon their creators, have taken our homes from us. Now we travel, a never-ending march around this barren wasteland. Nomads. Wanderers. There used to be trees there, we say, and beasts and insects and birds used to abound there. But now they are all dead, their corpses rotted away in the sun, their bones ground to dust by the relentless winds. There was a great river running through the forest once, we say, and all the lives in the forest were fed by the river. But the river is dry now, a parched throat of stones and caked sediment laced with the history of life. We lived there once, we say, heeding the beaconing call of the Earth. She gave us our homes. She gave us our lives. She gave us children and grandchildren, friends and community, love, endurance, courage, ardor. She granted us peace and beauty. All this, until our creations ran rampant and destroyed her, ravaged her. Now, we are scattered, homeless. Now, we are starved and stricken with illness. Now, we stumble onward, waiting, merely waiting, for impending doom.

Our creations, simple creatures, have existed for thousands of years, and with their annals of history and collections of knowledge and supposed wisdom, they still do not understand anything. Fire spews from their lairs, filling what used to be crisp, clear air with floods of heavy white ash and billowing black smoke. They tear at the Earth, skinning her alive and feeding off her lifeblood. They fill the Earth

with their own atrocious creations, and they wonder, like the ignorant, unlearning creatures they are, why the Earth screams in pain, why she fights against them, against these great and innumerable parasites.

It was said that when the end of the Earth is near, the first of our kind would be reincarnated into the last of our kind to provide protection, a way of escape. Had we realized this truth earlier, had we believed it, we could have stopped the end. Or could we? Could mere foreknowledge have changed the flow of time, the passage of events? Could Fate have been rerouted or turned off course? Or is the future unmovable, unalterable, unbending to the influence of temporal beings? Our creations go about their ways, fixed like stars, anchored in their habits like great trees. And we are not a strong wind that we can blow down those trees. We are not a god that we can move the stars.

So is the end of the Earth inescapable? Is it inevitable? we ask, voices whispered and low with fear.

It is so, we answer, strong and confident, hiding the stark terror shaking our souls.

What are we to do? we question, unable to resist the urge to act, however futile our actions will be.

What our ancestors did before us, we answer, remembering the lives we lived once. We search for Paradise.

Paradise? What is Paradise?

We feel the pull of our hearts when the word is spoken. A fake euphoria floods our brains with blurry, confused yet pleasant images and heartwarming yet strangely foreign sounds and scents. We know that Paradise is something for which we greatly hunger, but we do not know how to answer the question. We do not know what Paradise is, so we answer what we hope.

Paradise is a world other than this one, a place without rampant death and unruly destruction. It is a place where our Earth is not devoid of warmth, where we may live in peace.

The howling cheers of our brethren rise against the blackening sky, and we wonder how much of what we said is true. There are scoffers in this crowd, but those who cling to hope outweigh them and silence them. We surge forward, eager for Paradise, led by the few of us who remember our past lives, the few who feel the pull of Paradise.

We wander. We travel over endless barren deserts, starved and bereft of all life, and wind-buffeted mountains, colored dark with the blood of those who have fallen. We cross the paths of our creations and see the hopeless struggles in which they are inescapably en-

twined. They still quarrel amongst themselves. While every other living thing in this world senses the coming damnation and seeks to protect its own, these unruly creatures dispute over lifeless lands and destroy each other for greed and for fear. We who know of Paradise remember these creatures we created. Like the clouds that perpetually darken the skies, sadness rolls over our hearts, pricks our consciences, and stains our thoughts with blood. Our creatures have committed atrocities against the Earth and every other living thing, yet we are their cause, and we must bear their sins. The blood of our creatures — all the blood they have shed — is on our heads.

The sky darkens evermore. Clouds blot out the sun, veiling the heavens, stealing away the murky dusk, and plunging the Earth into overwhelming darkness. Lightning flashes, and a thick, heavy, toxic rain—waters made treacherous by our creations—falls upon us. We have no shelter. We are exposed. We who know of Paradise feel in our bones the screams of agony, the howls of maddening pain as the poison eats through the veins of our brethren. Without protection, we are tainted. Tainted, we are slain. We feel the heavy weight of many deaths left in our wake, the already half-rotted bodies of our brethren lying in the sand or on the rocky ridges. The stench of death fills the air, as if the Earth herself is seeking her own destruction, speeding fast the inevitable, committing suicide.

We struggle toward Paradise, but we know not where to go. The Earth, previously our guide, will show us no path to take. She hears our calls, we believe, but she will not guide us. She answers with dry, dusty winds and violent, crackling tempests. She answers with poison and fire, with hungry, quaking ground. But worst of all, she answers our pleas for guidance with our own creations. In their souls, though they do not consciously remember, they know we created them. And for that reason, they fear us. They hunt us. They kill us. They spear us with metal and burn us alive with unnatural fires. These creatures we created, they know nothing, they seek nothing but death and destruction.

"We are sorry!" we tell the Earth, our voices strained with the agony of regret and shame. "We did not know!" But it is too late. Far too late.

We search for Paradise, for a world not devoid of death, but devoid of senseless murder, senseless killing, senseless destruction and chaos—a world without those evil creatures we mistakenly created. We search until our numbers are thinned by the cold and bony grappling fingers of Death, until we are but a few, then fewer and fewer. We keep searching, keep hoping to find the door, the answer, the path to Paradise. We look to the once-starry sky. Perhaps the answer will

come from the celestial sphere closed off by a blockade of clouds and dust and ash and smoke, the heavens we can no longer see.

Perhaps it will come from the groaning and ruptured ground beneath us or the noxious deep, dark waters of the sea or the endless howling, screaming winds. But we find no such answer. We find no such answer. We search until we are but one life left on the Earth—one heart, one mind, one soul—bloodied, beaten, tired, dying, dragged along—until the veins empty and the heart stops—dragged along by the weakening pulse of fruitless, desperate hope.

She Kindly Stopped For Me

Mary Katherine Calderini

I don't want to take this one. I've been doing this for a while now, and I've never felt it this strongly, this revulsion at my task. And it's strange because when I have felt it before, it's always been the same situation. He or she is surrounded by family, friends, someone. They are crying, praying, whatever desperate people do, and I feel bad. Because I have to take their loved one away. I was human once. I know it. I remember things. Popcorn, and....some clouds, and....I know I was human. I have memories, but they come and go. I've been doing this a long time. I'm not sure what I am. Death, the Grimm Reaper, an angel, I don't know. They didn't tell me, or if they did, I have forgotten. I don't even know who they are. Who put me here. All I know now is my job, and right now, I don't want to do it.

This man is all alone. No one here to cry or pray for him, and though that usually makes it easier, tonight it gives me pause. I feel the people missing so strongly, it seems wrong to snatch him away before they can get here. But perhaps he has no one, and anyway, the compulsion grows stronger each moment I wait at the foot of the bed. It's what brought me here, what always brings me. It's how I know who to go to and it's how the job is ensured every time, because I can't resist the compulsion, no matter how hard I try, and yet I try. Five minutes. That's all I can give this man. Five long, hard fought minutes of resisting before I have to give in. I snap my fingers, and he appears before me. His soul anyway.

He blinks. Stares at me. Blinks again. "Are you an angel?"

"I don't know."

He nods and takes a step backwards, bumping into the bed that still holds his body. His eyes widen as he takes it in. "Oh. So I'm—"

"Dead." I nod.

"I see." He sighs. "Well—"

"I did it," I interrupt.

"Did what?"

"Killed you."

"I thought that was the disease raging inside me." He purses his lips into a smile.

"This is what I do. I take souls from your world and lead them to the other world."

"So, you're the Grim Reaper?"

"I don't know." We stare at each other a moment. "I gave you an extra five minutes."

"What?"

"Your life. You should have died five minutes ago. I gave them to you."

He stares at me. "Thank you. I bet they were a great five minutes."

"They weren't any five minutes. They were these last five minutes specifically."

"Oh." He stares at his body on the bed. "Then they were great. Thank you."

"You are trying to be kind."

"No. I was dreaming. A nice dream. You let me get to the end of it. Thank you."

For some reason, this makes me want to cry, which is absurd. I never cry. I never do anything but my job. He is still watching me. "Do you have a name?"

"I did once. When I was human."

"You were human? Like me?" I nod.

"How did you get this gig then?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know much, do you?" I must give him a look because his eyes widen. "I didn't mean it like that. I just meant that you don't seem to know much about all this."

"I don't. I only know my job. There is no one to ask. No one to complain to."

He nods. "Well, should I start getting, wherever I'm supposed to be going?"

I feel a stab in my chest at his words and I realize I don't want him to leave. "Of course," I say.

I snap my fingers and a wooden door appears to the side of us. One more snap and the door swings open onto a hallway. It is long and white, lit by old looking florescent lights that line the ceiling.

"Huh," he says.

"What?"

"I just didn't expect the afterlife to look so much like the inside of my office building."

I glance at the door again. I don't know what to say.

"Well," he takes a step towards the door. "I'll see you." He pauses then. "Actually, I don't know if I will."

"Once a soul goes through the door, I never see them again."

He stares at me a moment. "Do you usually talk to the souls you take?"

I stare back. "No."

He smiles. "I'm glad you talked to me." I feel strange. I don't know what to say. I nod. He takes a step though the doorway, then turns back to me.

"Where does this hallway lead anyway?" I open my mouth to reply. "You don't know?" he asks with a smile.

I feel my cheeks tighten and I realize I am smiling back. I can't remember the last time I did that. I don't smile or cry, just do my job. He gives me a final wave before walking down the hallway. I watch him disappear before I snap my fingers. The door closes. I stare at it a moment. One last snap, and the door is gone. I can feel the compulsion pulling me towards the next soul, but I linger at the foot of his bed. Five more minutes for the strange man.

I do not know why he had this effect on me. Perhaps he is the first in a long line of people I will encounter in my job who will do the same, but he is the first. And I've been doing this awhile. Maybe it's something else. Maybe I am somehow connected to him. Perhaps whoever I used to be meant something to this man. Maybe that is why the empty space around him affected me so, because I knew that I was supposed to be there, crying and praying, but I wasn't. I was here. Giving him five minutes. I search my memories of popcorn, clouds, and... the beach. Search them for anything, any sign of connection, but I find nothing. I move away from the bed. My five minutes are up. Maybe he was nothing to me after all. I don't remember.

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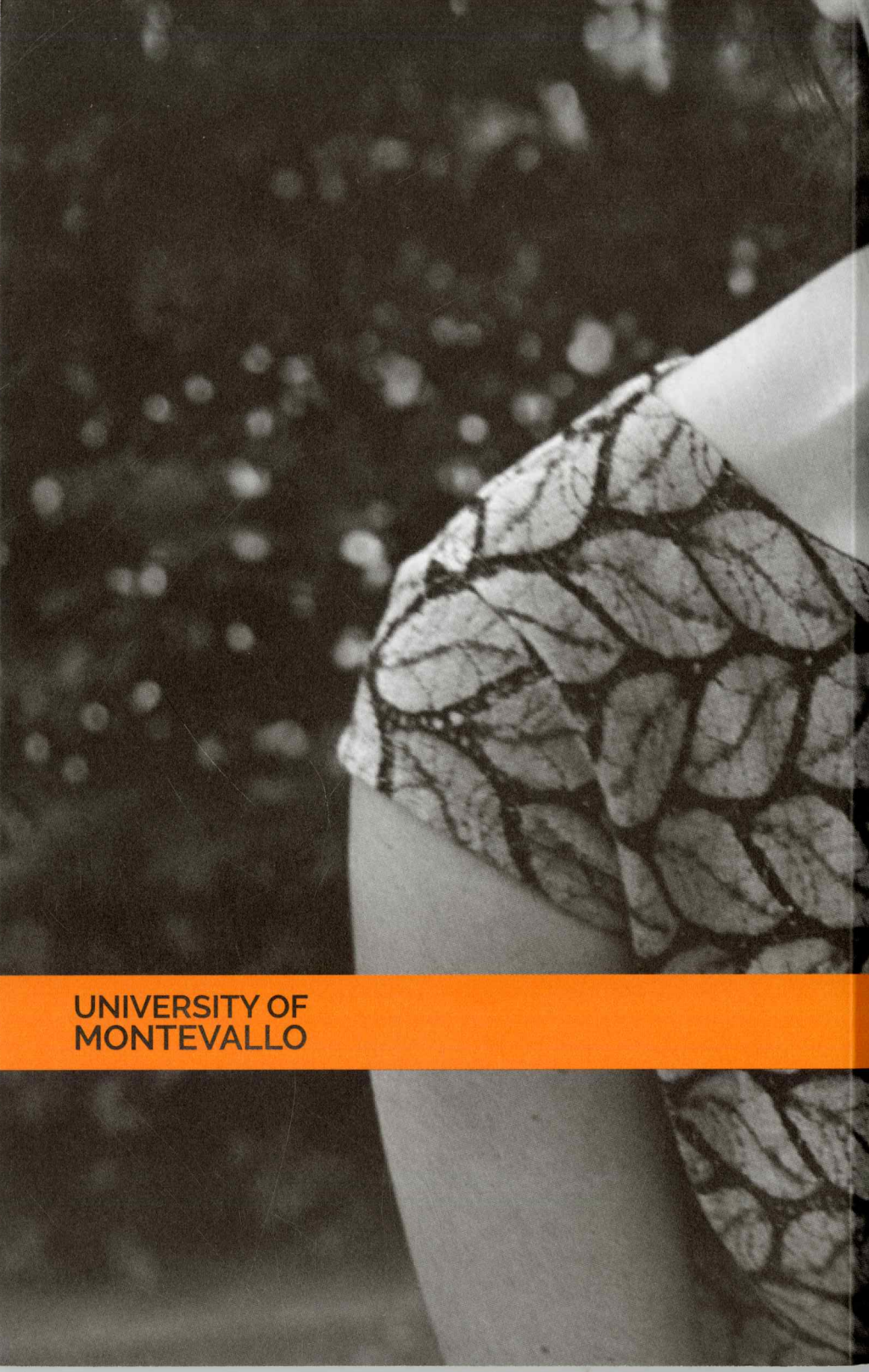
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